

The Commonwealth of Virginia allows local governments to create agricultural and forestal districts to help protect the rural character of an area and to enhance the economic viability of farms and woodland. Fauquier County, which established the voluntary program in the late 1970s, has 13 districts that contain approximately 80,000 acres.

The Board examines each request on a case-by-case basis and holds a public hearing following consideration by the Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission.

How can I learn more about the program?

Copies of the Virginia Agricultural and Forestal District Act and Fauquier County's pertinent ordinances are available in the Planning Division Office. Maps depicting the County's existing districts are also available for viewing. For more information, call 422-8210.

More resources for preserving rural land

- Fauquier County Commissioner of the Revenue: 540-422-8149
- Fauquier County Agricultural Development Office: 540-422-8280
- Virginia Cooperative Extension: 540-341-7950
- John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation: 540-347-3120
- Fauquier County Purchase of Development Rights: 540-422-8280
- Virginia Outdoors Foundation: 540-347-7727
- Virginia Department of Forestry: 540-347-6358

FAUQUIER COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PLANNING DIVISION

10 Hotel Street, Third floor
Warrenton, Virginia 20186
Phone: 540-422-8210
Fax: 540-422-8211

Additional information available online at
<http://www.fauquiercounty.gov>

Agricultural and Forestal Districts



FAUQUIER COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT

Districts are a mutual undertaking between landowners and the locality. Property in the district has some extra protection against certain public infrastructure improvements. While inclusion in a district does not change the zoning, inclusion can be a factor in local zoning decisions and planning policies.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the program provide tax benefits?

Yes. Property in an agricultural and forestal district, which otherwise meets the criteria for a Special Land Use Assessment, automatically qualifies for the Land Use Assessment program. The Commissioner of the Revenue administers this program. Under the Land Use program, property owners pay less in real estate taxes to keep their land rural. The four classifications eligible for a land use tax break include agricultural, forestal, horticultural and open space land, provided applicable requirements are met.

Land in an agricultural and forestal district may be exempt from special assessments, levies or taxes except on lots of one-half acre or less around a dwelling or non-farm structure.

Does the program restrict development?

Yes. Once a parcel is in a district, no lot less than 50 acres may be subdivided from the parcel, except for family transfers and boundary adjustments. Dwellings and certain agricultural and forestal uses are allowed by-right in these districts. Other uses may be sought with approval of a Special Permit or Special Exception.

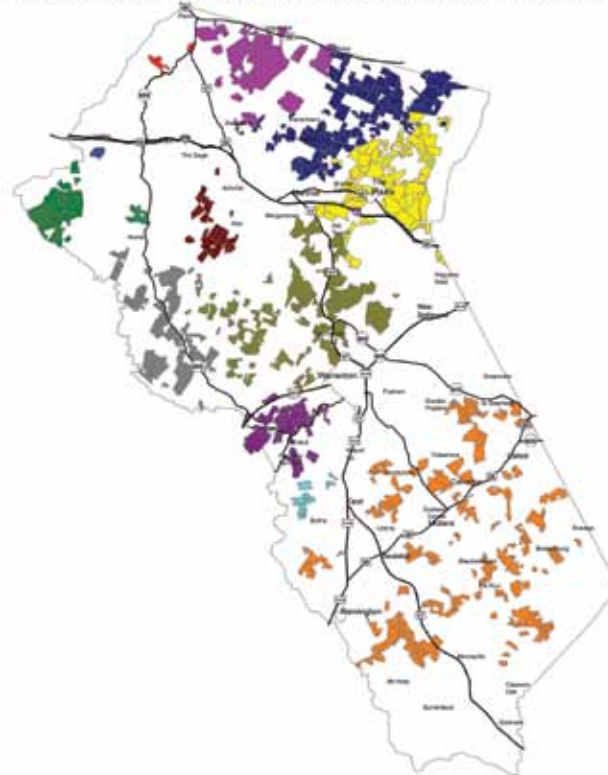
How do I establish or join a district?

Each district must contain a core of at least 200 acres in one or more contiguous parcels. An

eligible parcel may be added to a district if its nearest boundary lies within one mile of the core's boundary; if it adjoins such a parcel; or if the Board of Supervisors finds, in consultation with the Agricultural and Forestal Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission, that the parcel contains agriculturally and forestally significant land.

No parcel less than five acres may be added to a district. Parcels five to 25 acres may be added to a district provided they are under a perpetual conservation or open space easement held for public benefit. Agricultural and Forestal Districts are renewed every 8 years. During the renewal process acreage, ownership, and use of the parcels are reviewed prior to the Board of Supervisors' action on the district.

FAUQUIER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTAL DISTRICTS



Is there an application fee? What other information do I need to provide?

Yes, there is an application fee. Applications must be filed by February 1 of each year. They must include a United States Geological Survey topographic map and a Virginia Department of Transportation highway map, both showing the general location of the proposed district and addition. Applications may be obtained online at <http://www.fauquiercounty.gov/government/departments/CommDev/index.cfm?action=agandforestaldistrict> or at the Planning Division Office, Third Floor, 10 Hotel Street, Suite 305, Warrenton, VA, 20186.

How does the review process work?

The Fauquier County Agricultural and Forestal District Advisory Committee reviews applications and makes recommendations to the Planning Commission. The Commission holds a public hearing on the applications and forwards them, with recommendations, to the Board of Supervisors. The Board holds a public hearing before making the final decision on the applications.

How do I withdraw from a district?

There are several ways to withdraw from a district. (1) Land may be withdrawn during the renewal period before the Board of Supervisors acts to continue, modify or eliminate a district. (2) Upon a landowner's death, any heir or beneficiary of land of the deceased landowner may withdraw land from the district by written request. The request must be submitted within two years of the death of the property owner. (3) At any other time, a landowner may petition the Board of Supervisors for withdrawal from a district based on "good and reasonable cause."